

The Vedic View of Life

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Philosophy is the back-ground of all human activities. It is an invisible wire-puller. It colours the entire human life. Though apparently, philosophical fundamentals are confined to a selected few of the thinkers, masses cannot remain un-influenced. The waves of philosophical thoughts spread far and wide and permeate every stratum of life. Just as every rise and fall of our footsteps is subject to the invisible law of gravitation and even an animal who has no idea of any law of nature submits, though unconsciously, to that law, similarly all people submit to philosophical thought, either consciously or unconsciously. If we look deep into the ways of eastern living, we find the whole life falling victim to this wave of pessimism.

The entire oriental conception of life can be epitomized in one word **pessimism**. The easterners look upon life as something evil, a thing which is worth being renounced. Lord Buddha described the world transitory, full of sorrow and suffering, though he accepted possibility of emancipation. The great Shankaracharya regards the world as big illusion, a **maya**. It is common to compare life to a bubble on the surface of water or to a dream. The unsubstantiality of life is a theme that is more popular with the

poets and savants of the East. The renunciation of the world has always been the chief aim of the sages. Pessimistic philosophy negates the very purpose and meaning of life.

Optimism is the chief motor of all human institutions. All progress depends upon hope. As soon as you are convinced of the unreality of life you are deprived of the generative power of all activities. If the world is unreal, if we stand face to face with a big illusion, an abysmal nothingness, what is it that we should work for? If the world is nothing but a dream; then all our troubles and joys, all activities and inactivities are only a dream and we no more than dreamers. All patriotic and philanthropic institutions all efforts to alleviate the sufferings of men and animals are meaningless. What do discoveries and inventions mean to a man who feels that the world in which he lives is an illusion? Who will like to improve the life if, however improved, it is no more than a bubble?

What pleasure can the Universe vouchsafe for him who looks upon it as a prison house? What beauty can the sun, the moon the stars and other objects present to him who thinks that sheer misfortune has brought him to this life, which, the sooner comes to an end, the better? Will he like to pray that this life of prison be lengthened? Will he pray that others in the form of sons, grandsons and friends should also come and share with him the miseries of imprisonment? Who among the most foolish of prisoners, is such a fool that when destined to imprisonment might request the jail authorities to drag with him to the prison house, his family and friends.

Such pessimistic attitude can be noticed in most of Schools of the East and especially of India. For thousands of years before Dayananda the Indians have been leading an almost inactive life; with few elementary wants. The Indian philosophy prompted from the evil world was given a contemptuous place. There have been occasions when some Sivaji, or some Govind Singh, rose and made efforts to consider the hard facts and to see the world boldly in the face. But as they could not change the mentality of the people; to the desired extent what little they could do was soon undone. Consequently one hardly finds any significant progress, invention, discovery, or adventures, or achievement during the past few centuries. In fact nothing that can be the sign of wakefulness of a nation have been achieved by Indians. just as a magician spreads his magic pieces before an audience and the spectators though amused never care to get either his fruits or coins, just so an Indian sage thinks that the world before him is the work of a great magician who shows this or that either to amuse or to delude him. With this conception of life he develops an attitude of complete indifference to the world—its problem and welfare.

The great Shankar realising this weak point in the theory of **maya** and to counteract the evil divided the whole department of life into two parts—actual or **Parmarthic** (पारमार्थिक) and work-a-day or **Vyavaharik** (व्यवहारिक). He enunciated that from the ultimate standpoint world was unsubstantial or illusory but for all practical purposes it is real. He hoped that this proviso would provide man with sufficient motive power to work. But the remedy proved

as fatal as the disease. Suppositions are a weak support to solid actions. The feeling of **parmarthic** or actual nothingness lingered behind the supposed reality of the world, and we never made that serious progress which is the outcome of faith in the reality of life.

The glorious past. If we look at the past of India we are amazed at the progress which was made. Such a glorious past was never in the fate of any nation. Even the remnants of the past glory are dazzling enough. The grand buildings of which a few pieces are brought to light now and then, through excavations, show that marvellous must have been the Indian architecture. Ancient Indian art and ancient Indian literature are such as any nation can be proud of. Their linguistic achievements are simply wonderful. Where is a language more perfect than Sanscrits. Then while other civilisations have crumbled to pieces at slight cataclysms, the civilisation of India has stood a test. It has defied the wildest storms. It has survived the most violent shocks.

Living Vedic Philosophy :

How is all this possible? Had the Indians been ever pessimistic as dreaming, as illusion-struck, as they have been for during the past few centuries such achievements would have been simply out of question. Their conception of life must have been bolder and more lively and in order to provide them with a substantial incentive to go forward. Mere dreamers could not have achieved so much.

We would first look to the Vedas the books that can safely be our postulated fountain head of all religious life of India.

The one thing that strikes us most is that the Vedic prayers are superbly realistic. Pessimism is conspicuous by its absence. And if there is a tinge any where, it remarkably insignificant. No where has it been hinted that life is nothing. Long fellow's.

Life is real, life is earnest.,

reflects Vedism more than Christianity. The famous verse of the Yajur Veda which every Arya is enjoined to recite both morning and evening, testifies to this:—

तत् चक्षुर्देवहितं पुरस्तात् शुक्रमुच्चरत् । पश्येम शरदः शतम्
जीवेम शरदः शतम् शृणुयाम शरदः शतं प्रब्रवाम् शरदः शतमदीनाः
स्याम शरदः शतं भूयश्च शरदः शतात् ।

(Yajur V, 36, 24)

“That greatelye (God) has already placed in our being a potentiality or seed-power (शुक्र) May we see a hundred years ! May we hear the (Vedas) a hundred years ! May we preach a hundred years ! May we live **free** (आदीनाः) a hundred years ! aye several centuries.”

Pessimism can not stand before such hopeful prayers. A prayer for a full century of healthy and useful years of life has charms of its own. Who will like to remain in dream for a hundred years ? Who will like to stay in a world which is all pain, all misery, all affliction, even for a day ? Is it not a dire insult to the great Maker to call the world ugly, painful and bad ? What would you think of a watch maker if he produces a frail, useless and ugly watch ? And what will you think of the Great God whose work is alleged to be so bad ? The Vedas speak in a quite different strain :—

यो अदधाज ज्योतिष ज्योतिरन्तर्यो असृजन मधुना सं मधूनि ।

अघप्रियं शूषमिन्द्राय मन्म ब्रह्मकृतो बृहदुक्थाद वाचि ॥

(Rig. V. X. 56, 6.)

To that God are offered these sweet prayers by the divinely inspired devotee. Who puts **light into bright things** and who created **sweet things blent with sweetnees.**

How bright ! How sweet !

यस्येमे हिमवन्तो महित्वा,

यस्य समुद्रं रसया सहाहुः ।

यस्य माः प्रदिशो यस्य बाहु,

कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम् ॥

(Rig. V. X 121, 4)

Unto that Great God alone shall we offer prayers ? Whose are these high snow covered mountains : Whose is called the Ocean with its water; Whose are these direction; and Whose are these arms (of men representing strength)

मानो हिंसीज् जनिता यः पृथिव्या,

यो वा दिवं सत्यधर्मा जजान् ।

यश्चापश्चन्द्रा

बृहतीर्जजान्,

कस्मै देवाय हविषा विधेम् ॥

(Rig. Veda X, 121, 9)

Unto that Great God alone shall we offer prayers ? May he not harm us who is the Creator of the Earth; Or who being the controller of true laws, created the firmament and who created the great **delight-giving** waters.

The Vedas no-where seem to entertain such an idea. Look at the blessings showered upon the bride and bridegroom just when their nuptials are over :—

इहैव स्तं मा वि यौष्टं, विश्वमायुर्व्यश्नुतम् ।
क्रीडन्तौ पुत्रैर्नपुत्रभिः, मोदमानौ स्वे गृहे ॥

(Rig. Vedas X—85, 47)

"May you dwell here; be ye not parted; enjoy the full life; **playing** with sons and grandsons; rejoicing in your own house"*

Who will not welcome the duration of imprisonment reduced? But the Vedas no where admit of such notions. चिरंजीव or "live long" is the usual benediction allowed by the Vedas. In fact longevity is every-where prayed for.

Those who think that it is in conformity with Vedic teachings to look upon the world as a big illusion are mistaken like wise. They commit the mistake of taking or mistaking for the Vedas the books which are neither Vedas nor consonant with the Vedas. The doctrine of Maya or

*Compare with this the Christian view of life :—

'In England on the other hand and in Europe generally apart from the increasing influence of prudential considerations, there has always been the idea underlying the teaching of the Christian Churches that it is good for a man not to touch a woman'. 'Why' asks Tertullian, 'should we long to bear children..... Whom when we have them desire to send before us ourselves also longing to be removed, from this most wicked World? St Augustine admits that some persons ask, if all men abstain from sexual intercourse, whence the human race will exist, but he goes on 'would that all would thus (i. e. abstain).....much more speedily would the city of God be filled and the end of the world hastened.' (Census of India 1921, Volume, Part I (Page 154.) Europe did not progress as long as this mentality remained. The progress Europe has made now is due to change in the mentality, which is exhibited in the modern European literature.

Illusion which generally passes as Vedanta is nowhere encouraged in the Vedas. The Vedas no where, say that the world is a big illusion. Even the word 'Maya' which occurs so often in the Vedas does not mean illusion or nescience, but just the reverse of it. i. e. science or knowledge or intellect. In Nighantu the word माया is one of the eleven synonyms of प्रज्ञा or wisdom and the great Vedic lexicographer Yaska while commenting upon the word quotes several verses of the Rig Veda (e. g. Rig. Veda VI, 58, 1 ; X 88, 6; V, 85, 6; X, 71.5), where from the very context the word "Maya" means knowledge or wisdom and not an illusion.

Misinterpretation of Maya

It is true that in later ages the word "Maya" underwent a degrading change and began to be used in the sense of illusion. But the practice of looking upon the Universe as a big illusion is of a very late origin as compared with the age of Vedic civilization. It was the Budhistic nihilism or Budhistic idealism that first gave currency to the illusory conception of the outer universe. And subsequently Gaudapadacharya and Shankaracharya twisted the doctrine in their favour and gave it a Vedic tinge. Since then the whole Hinduism began to regard the world as a big illusion or a big dream and hence the national inertia or degradation to which we have been reduced.

If the universe were a dream or an illusion, the following bold injunction of the Vedas would have had no meaning at all :—

कुर्वन्नेवह कर्माणि जिजीविषेच्छत २२ समाः ।

(Yajur Veda 40, 2).

"Only doing actions in the world should one desire, to live a hundred years."

What do actions mean in dream or illusion ?

संगच्छध्वं संवदध्वं सं वो मनांसि जानताम् ।

(Rig. Veda X, 191, 2).

Walk together, speak together, and let your minds be united."

What place have walking, speaking and unity in a world which is no better than illusion ?

Then again, if the world has no real existence at all, what would the following verse mean ? :—

सूर्याचन्द्रमसौ धाता यथा पूर्वमकल्पयत् ।

(Rig. Veda X, 190, 3).

"The Creator **made** the sun and the moon as in the **previous cycles**."

If the world is an illusion, the sun and the moon that are a part thereof are also an illusion, and their creation has no meaning at all. Shankar's great proviso too that the word has no real reality but a practical reality only does not find support in any verse of the Vedas. Neither in the beginning, nor in the middle nor in the end of the Vedas is there any clear evidence that it is for practical purposes only that the universe be regarded as existent. The very first verse of the Rig Veda addressed to Agni gives a bold expression to a bold world : by no means, to a world supposed or illusory or merely seeming.

The importance of action is the first thing that the Vedas enjoin. A few instances may be cited :—

अग्ने यं यज्ञध्वरं विश्वतः परिभूरसि । स इद् देवेषुगच्छति ॥

(Rig. Veda, 1, 1, 4).

"O God the harmless sacrifice, which thou encompasseth all round, verily conduces to good qualities."

Here God (Agni) is said to be the encompasser of Yajna or good actions. Had Yajnas been due to nescience, God would never have been called their encompasser or doer.

पावका नः सरस्वती वाजेभिर्वाजिनीवती । यज्ञं वष्टु धियावसुः ।

(Rig. Veda, 1. 3. 10).

"Let purifying learning which provides us with means of livelihood, pervaded with wisdom, help our sacrifice."

चोदयित्री सुनृतानां चेतन्ती सुमतीनां । यज्ञं दधे सरस्वती ॥

(Ibid II)

"Learning, actuator of truths and inspirer of gracious thoughts supports the sacrifice."

महो अणः सरस्वती प्रचेतयति केतुना । धियो विश्वा विराजति ॥

(Ibid 12).

"Learning deep as a great ocean glories with action and illumines all intellects."

The Vedas abound with such verses which prove without doubt that actions or sacrifices are not the result of nescience. They are the imperative duties of learned men and are necessary not only for worldly prosperity but for ex-worldly bliss. The greatest error that has found currency among some influential schools of thought is that the Vedas hold all actions as result of nescience and enjoin the renunciation of them. Those texts which glorify if glorifying action is either belittled or mis-interpreted only to conform to the supposed theories. I shall give one instance. While, writing an exposition of the 2nd verse of the 40th chapter of Yajur Veda कुर्वन्न etc., (which I have quoted above) the great Shanker says :—

अथतरस्यानात्मज्ञानतयाऽऽत्मग्रहणयाशक्तस्येदमुपदिशतिमन्त्रः-
कुर्वन्नेवेति ॥

"This verse (कुर्वन्नेत) advises that one who is different, i. e. ignorant of spiritual science, is unfit to receive spiritual knowledge."

I hold that this remark is unwarranted and utterly unfounded. It has been put in by the learned expositor, only in order to make the Vedas consistent with his absolutely non-Vedic theory that actions are due to ignorance, nescience or Avidya.

Some persons think that the Vedas have nothing to do with mundane affairs, they speak of God or Gods only. This is utterly wrong. Religion according to the Vedic doctrines belongs not only to one phase of life but to the whole of it. Kanad the author of Vaisheshik defines religion as :

यतोऽभ्युदयो निश्चेयसिद्धिः स धर्मः

"That which is conducive through worldly prosperity to ex-worldly bliss." This is, I think, the correctest position of the Vedas. This is the spirit that pervades through all the Vedas. The Vedas do not ignore any department of life. Their love of nature is proverbial. If you read the Vedas you cannot but be impressed with the beauties of the Universe. Lordly mountains, gliding streams, spacious firmaments they all inspire. Not vagaries or cruelties of nature, but its sweetness, grandeur and loveliness are the themes of the Vedic verses. They create in the reader's mind not a hatred, but a peculiar love towards the great work of the great God. The Vedas nowhere speak of an abstract God who has nothing to do

with the universe or is absolutely unconnected with living being. An actionless, unconnected God who belongs to nothing and to whom nothings belongs, who loves nothing and is loved by nothing, will by an entity no better than nothing, hardly an object of worship or human devotion. God is ours and we are His. He loves us and we should love Him. The Vedas sing of him as :

स नः पिता जनिता स उत बन्धुः ।

(Atharva II. 1, 3).

He is **our** father, life-giver and kin as well."

Think of the word नः or "our" How inspiring. This small syllable "**our**" has charms of its own. It has thrilling effect upon the devotee's heart. God is ours. He has not thrown us into a dungeon. He could not have done it. He is so loving. This life and this universe have nothing in common with a dungeon. Dungeon is place of whererevenge, hatred, cruelty, oppression and other human weaknesses. have their place. The universe is something quite different quite distinct. It is friendly univers that the Vedas refer to

यो नो दिवस्तु वातो अन्तरिक्षात् । अग्निर्नः पार्थिवेभ्यः ॥

(Rig. Veda X. 158. 1.)

"May the sun protect us from above, may the wind from the wide space; may fire protect us from below."

The **Vedic attitude towards worldly prosperity.**

Wealth is, perhaps, the most important factor of worldly prosperity. All the institutions of society appear to be converging to this one point. Eliminate wealth and all things topple down like a house of cards. Such a necessary thing the Vedas should not have ignored. Riches are not a curse and therefore nowhere have they been condemned

nor rich men reviled. The Vedas donot say like the Bible that for a camel it is possible to pass through the eye of needle, but for a richman it is impossible to enter heaven. The Vedas extol wealth and rightly so.

वयं स्याम पतयो रयीणाम् ॥

“Let us be lords of **wealth**.”

(Yajur Veda XXXIV—3. 5).

इन्द्र मूलं मह्यं जीवातुम इच्छु चोदय धियम् अयसो न धाराम ॥
(Rig. Veda VI—47—10).

“O God, be kind, give me livelihood, sharpen my mind like the edge of an iron instrument”

सं चोदय चिह्नमर्वाग्नाथ इन्द्र वरेण्यम् । असदित्ते विमु प्रभु ॥

(Rig. I, 9. 5).

“O Lord, thine is verily the wonderful all pervading and all influential wealth. Bring it unto us.”

अस्मान्सु तन्न चोदयेन्द्र राये रमस्वतः । तुविद्युम्न यशस्वतः ॥

(Ibid 6).

“O Lord of many riches, inspire us, who are energetic and glorious, for wealth there.”

सं गो मदिन्द्रबाजवदस्मे पृथु श्रवो बृहत् विश्वायुर्ध्व ह्यक्षितम् ।

(Ibid. 7).

“O Lord, give unto us, wide, big, lifelasting, indestructible wealth, consisting of cows and corn.”

अस्मे धेहि श्रवो बृहद् द्युम्नं सहस्रसातमम् । इन्द्र हारिथिनीरिषः ॥

(Ibid 8).

“O Lord, give unto us, big, illuminating, thousand fold riches and those chariotful foods.

ओजोस्योजो मे दाः स्वाहा ।

सहोसि सहो मे दाः स्वाहा ।

बलमसि बलं मे दाः स्वाहा ।

आयुरस्यायुर्मे दाः स्वाहा ।

श्रोत्रमसि श्रोत्रं मे दाः स्वाहा ।

चक्षूरसि चक्षुर्मे दाः स्वाहा ।

(Atharva Veda, 11—17).

1. Glory art thou, give me glory. All hail.
2. Patience art thou, give me patience. All hail.
3. Strength art thou, give me strength. All hail.
4. Life thou art, give me life. All hail.
5. Ear thou art, give me ear. All hail.
6. Eye thou art, give me eye. All hail.

All these quotations show that the Vedas enjoin us to look the world in the face ; to rise up to the situation and to try to possess all worldly powers so that we may be dependent upon none and living successfully in the world, may pass peacefully to ex-worldly bliss.

No doubt there is a tinge of asceticism in certain verses, but this asceticism is meant only for those who have outgrown the world.

Renunciation and pessimism are not the same thing. The latter depicts the world as a hopeless mass of miseries while the former realises the beauties of nature and still keeps an eye upon something beyond, which is much more beautiful. It does not say that the world is an evil and should therefore be forsaken. It says that the world is good. It has its use. It has its duties and its enjoyments. But it has a limit. When one has played one's part heroically, it is but necessary that a stage further should be taken.

Our different lives are, so to speak, different rungs of ladder all of them beautiful ; all of them useful; none to be belittled or ignored. But after all they are rungs and we must turn our back on the rung that we have passed and come to another rung. We are born in this world, to live and to work, not to die or be idle. But when we have lived the full course and worked our complete share, we should have no hesitation in passing away.

Renunciation says that this present world is all good but still better is the world to follow and you can not enter that next world unless and until you have fully realized the chances offered to you is this world. Our different lives are just like the classes of a school ; none unreal, none bad, none to be belittled. Who will be so foolish as to think that the particular class he belongs to is bad or inferior ? And who will be so foolish as to be sorry to leave the class when after a creditable success in the annual examination, he is asked to pass on to a higher class.

This is the only reasonable view of life and true progress can be made only by realizing the truth of it. We should drive way all foolish ideas about the unrealistic or dreamy nature of the world. We should understand that the world we live in is real. We are real. We should be wakeful. Let us be a hero in the strife.'
